

The People's Idea of God

Its Effect on
Health and Christianity

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A Sermon Delivered at Boston

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Sermon

SUBJECT

THE PEOPLE'S IDEA OF GOD

1 TEXT: *One Lord, one faith, one baptism.* — EPHESIANS iv. 5

3 EVERY step of progress is a step more spiritual. The
great element of reform is not born of human wis-
6 dom; it draws not its life from human organizations;
rather is it the crumbling away of material elements from
reason, the translation of law back to its original language,
— Mind, and the final unity between man and God.
9 The footsteps of thought, as they pass from the sensual
side of existence to the reality and Soul of all things, are
slow, portending a long night to the traveller; but the
12 guardians of the gloom are the angels of His presence, that
impart grandeur to the intellectual wrestling and colli-
sions with old-time faiths, as we drift into more spiritual
latitudes. The beatings of our heart can be heard; but
15 the ceaseless throbbings and throes of thought are unheard,
as it changes from material to spiritual standpoints. Even
the pangs of death disappear, accordingly as the under-
18 standing that we are spiritual beings here reappears, and

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1 we learn our capabilities for good, which insures man's
continuance and is the true glory of immortality.

3 The improved theory and practice of religion and of
medicine are mainly due to the people's improved views
of the Supreme Being. As the finite sense of Deity, based
6 on material conceptions of spiritual being, yields its grosser
elements, we shall learn what God is, and what God does.
The Hebrew term that gives another letter to the word
9 *God* and makes it *good*, unites Science and Christianity,
whereby we learn that God, *good*, is universal, and the
divine Principle, — Life, Truth, Love; and this Principle is
12 learned through goodness, and of Mind instead of matter,
of Soul instead of the senses, and by revelation supporting
reason. It is the false conceptions of Spirit, based on the
15 evidences gained from the material senses, that make a
Christian only in theory, shockingly material in practice,
and form its Deity out of the worst human qualities, else
18 of wood or stone.

Such a theory has overturned empires in demoniacal con-
tests over religion. Proportionately as the people's belief

21 of God, in every age, has been dematerialized and unfinited
has their Deity become good; no longer a personal tyrant
or a molten image, but the divine Life, Truth, and Love,
24 — Life without beginning or ending, Truth without a
lapse or error, and Love universal, infinite, eternal. This
more perfect idea, held constantly before the people's
27 mind, must have a benign and elevating influence upon
the character of nations as well as individuals, and will

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1 lift man ultimately to the understanding that our ideals
form our characters, that as a man "thinketh in his heart,
3 so is he." The crudest ideals of speculative theology
have made monsters of men; and the ideals of *materia*
medica have made helpless invalids and cripples. The
6 eternal roasting amidst noxious vapors; the election of the
minority to be saved and the majority to be eternally pun-
ished; the wrath of God, to be appeased by the sacrifice
9 and torture of His favorite Son, — are some of the false
beliefs that have produced sin, sickness, and death; and
then would affirm that these are natural, and that Chris-
12 tianity and Christ-healing are preternatural; yea, that
make a mysterious God and a natural devil.

15 Let us rejoice that the bow of omnipotence already
spans the moral heavens with light, and that the more
spiritual idea of good and Truth meets the old material
18 thought like a promise upon the cloud, while it inscribes
on the thoughts of men at this period a more metaphysical
religion founded upon Christian Science. A personal
21 God is based on finite premises, where thought begins
wrongly to apprehend the infinite, even the quality or the
quantity of eternal good. This limited sense of God as
good limits human thought and action in their goodness,
24 and assigns them mortal fetters in the outset. It has im-
planted in our religions certain unspiritual shifts, such as
dependence on personal pardon for salvation, rather than
27 obedience to our Father's demands, whereby we grow out
of sin in the way that our Lord has appointed; namely,

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1 by working out our own salvation. It has given to all
systems of *materia medica* nothing but materialism, —
3 more faith in hygiene and drugs than in God. Idolatry
sprang from the belief that God is a form, more than an
infinite and divine Mind; sin, sickness, and death origi-
6 nated in the belief that Spirit materialized into a body,
infinity became finity, or man, and the eternal entered the
temporal. Mythology, or the myth of ologies, said that

9 Life, which is infinite and eternal, could enter finite man
through his nostrils, and matter become intelligent of
12 good and evil, because a serpent said it. When first good,
God, was named a person, and evil another person, the
error that a personal God and a personal devil entered
15 into partnership and would form a third person, called
material man, obtained expression. But these unspiritual
and mysterious ideas of God and man are far from
correct.

18 The glorious Godhead is Life, Truth, and Love, and
these three terms for one divine Principle are the three in
one that can be understood, and that find no reflection in
21 sinning, sick, and dying mortals. No miracle of grace can
make a spiritual mind out of beliefs that are as material as
the heathen deities. The pagan priests appointed Apollo
24 and Esculapius the gods of medicine, and they inquired of
these heathen deities what drugs to prescribe. Systems
of religion and of medicine grown out of such false ideals
27 of the Supreme Being cannot heal the sick and cast out
devils, error. Eschewing a materialistic and idolatrous

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1 theory and practice of medicine and religion, the apostle
devoutly recommends the more spiritual Christianity, —
3 "one Lord, one faith, one baptism." The prophets and
apostles, whose lives are the embodiment of a living faith,
have not taken away our Lord, that we know not where they
6 have laid him; they have resurrected a deathless life of
love; and into the cold materialisms of dogma and doctrine
we look in vain for their more spiritual ideal, the risen
9 Christ, whose *materia medica* and theology were one.

The ideals of primitive Christianity are nigh, even at
our door. Truth is not lost in the mists of remoteness or
12 the barbarisms of spiritless codes. The right ideal is not
buried, but has risen higher to our mortal sense, and
having overcome death and the grave, wrapped in a pure
15 winding-sheet, it sitteth beside the sepulchre in angel
form, saying unto us, "Life is God; and our ideal of God
has risen above the sod to declare His omnipotence." This
18 white-robed thought points away from matter and doctrine,
or dogma, to the diviner sense of Life and Love, —
yea, to the Principle that is God, and to the demonstration
21 thereof in healing the sick. Let us then heed this heavenly
visitant, and not entertain the angel unawares.

24 The ego is not self-existent matter animated by mind,
but in itself is mind; therefore a Truth-filled mind makes
a pure Christianity and a healthy mind and body. Oliver
Wendell Holmes said, in a lecture before the Harvard

27 Medical School: "I firmly believe that if the whole *materia medica* could be sunk to the bottom of the sea, it would be

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1 all the better for mankind and all the worse for the fishes."
2 Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse writes: "I am sick of learned
3 quackery." Dr. Abercrombie, Fellow of the Royal Col-
4 lege of Physicians in Edinburgh, writes: "Medicine is the
5 science of guessing." Dr. James Johnson, Surgeon Ex-
6 traordinary to the King, says: "I declare my conscientious
7 belief, founded on long observation and reflection, that
8 if there was not a single physician, surgeon, apothecary,
9 man-midwife, chemist, druggist, or drug on the face of
10 the earth, there would be less sickness and less mortality
11 than now obtains." Voltaire says: "The art of medicine
12 consists in amusing the patient while nature cures the
13 disease."

14 Believing that man is the victim of his Maker, we natu-
15 rally fear God more than we love Him; whereas "perfect
16 Love casteth out fear;" but when we learn God aright, we
17 love Him, because He is found altogether lovely. Thus it
18 is that a more spiritual and true ideal of Deity improves
19 the race physically and spiritually. God is no longer a
20 mystery to the Christian Scientist, but a divine Principle,
21 understood in part, because the grand realities of Life and
22 Truth are found destroying sin, sickness, and death; and
23 it should no longer be deemed treason to understand God,
24 when the Scriptures enjoin us to "acquaint now thyself
25 with Him [God], and be at peace;" we should understand
26 something of that great good for which we are to leave all
27 else.

Periods and peoples are characterized by their highest

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1 or their lowest ideals, by their God and their devil. We are
2 all sculptors, working out our own ideals, and leaving the
3 impress of mind on the body as well as on history and
4 marble, chiselling to higher excellence, or leaving to rot and
5 ruin the mind's ideals. Recognizing this as we ought, we
6 shall turn often from marble to model, from matter to
7 Mind, to beautify and exalt our lives.

8 "Chisel in hand stood a sculptor-boy,
9 With his marble block before him;
10 And his face lit up with a smile of joy
11 As an angel dream passed o'er him.
12 He carved the dream on that shapeless stone
13 With many a sharp incision.
14 With heaven's own light the sculptor shone, —

15 He had caught the angel-vision.

"Sculptors of life are we as we stand
With our lives uncarved before us,
18 Waiting the hour when at God's command
Our life dream passes o'er us.
If we carve it then on the yielding stone
21 With many a sharp incision,
Its heavenly beauty shall be our own, —
Our lives that angel-vision."

24 To remove those objects of sense called sickness and dis-
ease, we must appeal to mind to improve its subjects and
objects of thought, and give to the body those better de-
27 lineations. Scientific discovery and the inspiration of
Truth have taught me that the health and character of
man become more or less perfect as his mind-models are
30 more or less spiritual. Because God is Spirit, our thoughts
must spiritualize to approach Him, and our methods grow
more spiritual to accord with our thoughts. Religion and

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1 medicine must be dematerialized to present the right idea
of Truth; then will this idea cast out error and heal the
3 sick. If changeableness that repenteth itself; partiality
that elects some to be saved and others to be lost, or that
answers the prayer of one and not of another; if incom-
6 petency that cannot heal the sick, or lack of love that will
not; if unmercifulness, that for the sins of a few tired
years punishes man eternally, — are our conceptions of
9 Deity, we shall bring out these qualities of character in our
own lives and extend their influence to others.

Judaism, enjoining the limited and definite form of a
12 national religion, was not more the antithesis of Chris-
tianity than are our finite and material conceptions of
Deity. Life is God; but we say that Life is carried on
15 through principal processes, and speculate concerning
material forces. Mind is supreme; and yet we make more
of matter, and lean upon it for health and life. Mind,
18 that governs the universe, governs every action of the body
as directly as it moves a planet and controls the muscles
of the arm. God grant that the trembling chords of human
21 hope shall again be swept by the divine *Talitha cumi*,
"Damsel, I say unto thee, arise." Then shall Christian
Science again appear, to light our sepulchres with im-
24 mortality. We thank our Father that to-day the uncre-
mated fossils of material systems, already charred, are
fast fading into ashes; and that man will ere long stop
27 trusting where there is no trust, and gorging his faith with
skill proved a million times unskillful.

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1 Christian Science has one faith, one Lord, one baptism;
and this faith builds on Spirit, not matter; and this bap-
3 tism is the purification of mind, — not an ablution of the
body, but tears of repentance, an overflowing love, wash-
ing away the motives for sin; yea, it is love leaving self
6 for God. The cool bath may refresh the body, or as com-
pliance with a religious rite may declare one's belief; but
it cannot purify his mind, or meet the demands of Love.
9 It is the baptism of Spirit that washes our robes and makes
them white in the blood of the Lamb; that bathes us in the
life of Truth and the truth of Life. Having one Lord, we
12 shall not be idolaters, dividing our homage and obedience
between matter and Spirit; but shall work out our own
salvation, after the model of our Father, who never par-
15 dons the sin that deserves to be punished and can be de-
stroyed only through suffering.

We ask and receive not, because we "ask amiss;" even
18 dare to invoke the divine aid of Spirit to heal the sick, and
then administer drugs with full confidence in their efficacy,
showing our greater faith in matter, despite the authority
21 of Jesus that "ye cannot serve two masters."

Silent prayer is a desire, fervent, importunate: here
24 metaphysics is seen to rise above physics, and rest all faith
in Spirit, and remove all evidence of any other power than
Mind; whereby we learn the great fact that there is no
omnipotence, unless omnipotence is the *All*-power. This
27 truth of Deity, understood, destroys discord with the higher
and more potent evidences in Christian Science of man's

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1 harmony and immortality. Thought is the essence of an
act, and the stronger element of action; even as steam is
3 more powerful than water, simply because it is more
ethereal. Essences are refinements that lose some materi-
ality; and as we struggle through the cold night of physics,
6 matter will become vague, and melt into nothing under the
microscope of Mind.

9 Massachusetts succored a fugitive slave in 1853, and put
her humane foot on a tyrannical prohibitory law regulating
the practice of medicine in 1880. It were well if the sister
States had followed her example and sustained as nobly
12 our constitutional Bill of Rights. Discerning the God-
given rights of man, Paul said, "I was free born." Justice
and truth make man free, injustice and error enslave
15 him. Mental Science alone grasps the standard of liberty,
and battles for man's whole rights, divine as well as hu-
man. It assures us, of a verity, that mortal beliefs, and

18 not a law of nature, have made men sinning and sick, —
that they alone have fettered free limbs, and marred in
mind the model of man.

21 We possess our own body, and make it harmonious or
discordant according to the images that thought reflects
upon it. The emancipation of our bodies from sickness
24 will follow the mind's freedom from sin; and, as St. Paul
admonishes, we should be "waiting for the adoption, to
wit, the redemption of our body." The rights of man were
27 vindicated but in a single instance when African slavery
was abolished on this continent, yet that hour was a

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1 prophecy of the full liberty of the sons of God as found in
Christian Science. The defenders of the rights of the
3 colored man were scarcely done with their battles before a
new abolitionist struck the keynote of higher claims, in
which it was found that the feeblest mind, enlightened
6 and spiritualized, can free its body from disease as well as
sin; and this victory is achieved, not with bayonet and
blood, not by inhuman warfare, but in divine peace.

9 Above the platform of human rights let us build another
staging for diviner claims, — even the supremacy of Soul
over sense, wherein man cooperates with and is made sub-
12 ject to his Maker. The lame, the blind, the sick, the sen-
sual, are slaves, and their fetters are gnawing away life
and hope; their chains are clasped by the false teachings,
15 false theories, false fears, that enforce new forms of op-
pression, and are the modern Pharaohs that hold the chil-
dren of Israel still in bondage. Mortals, *alias* mortal
18 minds, make the laws that govern their bodies, as directly
as men pass legislative acts and enact penal codes; while
the body, obedient to the legislation of mind, but ignorant
21 of the law of belief, calls its own enactments "laws of
matter." The legislators who are greatly responsible for
all the woes of mankind are those leaders of public thought
24 who are mistaken in their methods of humanity.

The learned quacks of this period "bind heavy bur-
dens," that they themselves will not touch "with one of
27 their fingers." Scientific guessing conspires unwittingly
against the liberty and lives of men. Should we but

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1 hearken to the higher law of God, we should think for one
moment of these divine statutes of God: Let them have
3 "dominion over all the earth." "And if they drink any
deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands
on the sick, and they shall recover." The only law of sick-

6 ness or death is a law of mortal belief, an infringement
on the merciful and just government of God. When this
9 great fact is understood, the spurious, imaginary laws of
matter — when matter is not a lawgiver — will be dis-
puted and trampled under the feet of Truth. Deal, then,
12 with this fabulous law as with an inhuman State law; re-
peal it in mind, and acknowledge only God in all thy ways,
— "who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy
15 diseases." Few there be who know what a power mind is
to heal when imbued with the spiritual truth that lifts man
above the demands of matter.

18 As our ideas of Deity advance to truer conceptions,
we shall take in the remaining two thirds of God's plan
of redemption, — namely, man's salvation from sickness
and death. Our blessed Master demonstrated this great
21 truth of healing the sick and raising the dead as God's
whole plan, and proved the application of its Principle to
human wants. Having faith in drugs and hygienic drills,
24 we lose faith in omnipotence, and give the healing power
to matter instead of Spirit. As if Deity would not if He
could, or could not if He would, give health to man; when
27 our Father bestows heaven not more willingly than health;
for without health there could be no heaven.

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1 The worshippers of wood and stone have a more mate-
rial deity, hence a lower order of humanity, than those
3 who believe that God is a personal Spirit. But the wor-
shippers of a person have a lower order of Christianity than
he who understands that the Divine Being is more than a
6 person, and can demonstrate in part this great impersonal
Life, Truth, and Love, casting out error and healing the
sick. This all-important understanding is gained in
9 Christian Science, revealing the one God and His all-
power and ever-presence, and the brotherhood of man in
unity of Mind and oneness of Principle.

12 On the startled ear of humanity rings out the iron tread
of merciless invaders, putting man to the rack for his
conscience, or forcing from the lips of manhood shameful
15 confessions, — Galileo kneeling at the feet of priestcraft,
and giving the lie to science. But the lofty faith of the
pious Polycarp proved the triumph of mind over the body,
18 when they threatened to let loose the wild beasts upon him,
and he replied: "Let them come; I cannot change at once
from good to bad." Then they bound him to the stake,
21 set fire to the fagots, and his pure faith went up through
the baptism of fire to a higher sense of Life. The infidel
was blind who said, "Christianity is fit only for women and

24 weak-minded men." But infidels disagree; for Bonaparte
said: "Since ever the history of Christianity was written,
27 the loftiest intellects have had a practical faith in God;"
and Daniel Webster said: "My heart has assured and re-
assured me that Christianity must be a divine reality."

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1 As our ideas of Deity become more spiritual, we express
them by objects more beautiful. To-day we clothe our
3 thoughts of death with flowers laid upon the bier, and in
our cemeteries with amaranth blossoms, evergreen leaves,
6 fragrant recesses, cool grottos, smiling fountains, and
white monuments. The dismal gray stones of church-
yards have crumbled into decay, as our ideas of Life have
grown more spiritual; and in place of "bat and owl on the
9 bending stones, are wreaths of immortelles, and white
fingers pointing upward." Thus it is that our ideas of
divinity form our models of humanity. O Christian Scien-
12 tist, thou of the church of the new-born; awake to a
higher and holier love for God and man; put on the whole
armor of Truth; rejoice in hope; be patient in tribulation,
15 — that ye may go to the bed of anguish, and look upon this
dream of life in matter, girt with a higher sense of omni-
potence; and behold once again the power of divine Life and
18 Love to heal and reinstate man in God's own image and
likeness, having "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."